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English vocabulary teaching in Chinese junior high schools

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ENGLISH VOCABULARY TEACHING IN CHINESE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

For the degree of Master of Science in Education

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IN CHINESE JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOLS

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Submitted to the Faculty

of

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ABSTRACT

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Vocabulary learning is an important and indispensable part of the English language learning process. In this paper, the author tried to examine the vocabulary teaching practice in Chinese junior high schools. A questionnaire was used to investigate the problem from the perspectives of in-service teachers. Besides, the National English Curriculum (MOE, 2011) served as another important source of data in this study. The data revealed that progress has been made in English vocabulary teaching in Chinese junior high schools. Teachers are utilizing a wider range of educational resources and vocabulary teaching strategies during their instruction. The methods to assess vocabulary have also become more diversified. In addition to the enhancement in English vocabulary teaching practice, areas for further improvement were identified and pedagogical implications from the study were also discussed. Drawing on the data collected from the study and the official English curriculum (MOE, 2011), and research on vocabulary teaching, the author proposed three tentative suggestions to further improve the vocabulary teaching practice in Chinese junior high schools. The suggestions include: an emphasis on the teaching and testing of productive vocabulary; an increasing focus on the incidental acquisition of vocabulary; and construction of a comprehensive and balanced

vocabulary assessment system which employed diversified assessment tools

(formative/summative assessment; context-dependent/ context-independent assessment).

CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

In the past three decades, English has risen to be the predominant foreign language in China. More and more Chinese people are viewing English as a key to a fulfilling life. To students, a good command of English is a great asset in their future living, learning and work. Proficiency in English provides students with a host of opportunities for higher education at home or abroad, lucrative jobs, as well as social prestige (Hu, 2003). Due to the critical role of English in national modernization and economic development, Chinese government has attached great importance to English education across the country. All students in China are required to learn English as a foreign language since primary school. A survey has shown that the total number of English language learners in China was over 300 million, which was almost equal to the population of the U.S. in 2009 (Wei & Su, 2012).

Vocabulary learning plays a significant role in learners' whole process of second language acquisition. To some extent, the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge determines learners' proficiency in the target language. Vocabulary knowledge is the essential building block for effective communication. Just as Wilkins (1972) said, nothing can be conveyed without vocabulary. In addition, vocabulary knowledge is positively correlated with reading comprehension. According to Stahl (2003), there is a "robust" relationship between vocabulary and reading comprehension and vocabulary

knowledge is the “foremost predictor of a text’s difficulty” (p. 241). A large vocabulary can help student’s process text in a more efficient way. In fact, students’ vocabulary knowledge has been found to be highly predictive of their performance on reading comprehension. Garcia (1991) conducted a study to investigate the factors that influence the reading test performance of Hispanic children, and discovered that the unknown vocabulary in the questions was the major linguistic factor that contributed to Hispanic children’s low performance reading comprehension. In addition, a lack of vocabulary knowledge will create obstacles for acquiring other important language skills like speaking, listening, reading and writing. English vocabulary teaching and learning in junior high school plays a key role in students English language development. Therefore, it is essential to lay a solid knowledge foundation at this crucial stage for students’ more advanced levels of language learning.

This paper probes into the current vocabulary teaching practice in Chinese junior high schools. Firstly, I will discuss literature concerning the role of vocabulary in learning English, research on vocabulary teaching and learning as well as vocabulary teaching in China (mainly about the current official policy on English vocabulary teaching in Chinese junior high schools). Secondly, I will provide a detailed description about the design of the study, which was conducted to investigate the current English vocabulary teaching practice in Chinese junior high schools from the perspectives of in-service English teachers. E-mail questionnaire and documentary (the official curriculum) were two major sources of data in this study. Thirdly, from the analyzed data, I will draw key facts about vocabulary teaching practice in Chinese junior high schools. Fourthly, I will further discuss and analyze the key findings from the study. Implications of current

vocabulary teaching practice will be examined and recommendations for pedagogical practice will also be provided. Finally I will summarize the study and put forward directions for future research.

CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

The Role of Vocabulary in Learning English

Vocabulary learning is one of the most essential parts of the English language learning process. British linguist Wilkins (1972) stated that “without grammar little can be conveyed, without vocabulary, nothing can be conveyed” (p. 111). Similarly, Krashen (1989) maintained that, “A large vocabulary is, of course, essential for mastery of a language. Second language acquirers know this; they carry dictionaries with them, not grammar books, and regularly report that lack of vocabulary is a major problem.” (p. 440). It is important for English language learners to have an extensive knowledge of the breadth and depth of English vocabulary. According to Meara (1996), “Lexical competence is at the heart of communicative competence” (p. 35). Undoubtedly, a good mastery of vocabulary knowledge is a prerequisite for effective communication. McCarthy (1990) demonstrated that “no matter how well the student learns grammar, no matter how successful the sounds of L2 (second language) are mastered, without words to express a wide range of meaning, communication in an L2 just cannot happen in any meaningful way” (p. 265). To some extent, the English language learner’s lexical competence determines his or her level of English proficiency.

In addition, vocabulary knowledge correlates with other aspects of English language learning. For example, students’ lexical knowledge and reading comprehension

have been found to be closely related. Baumann, Kame'enhui, & Ash (2003) argued that, “the relationship between word knowledge and comprehension is unequivocal” (p. 775). Students with an extensive and profound knowledge of vocabulary can process texts with fewer comprehension breakdowns caused by unknown words and can even infer meaning of those unknown words from context. Qian (2002) did a study among 217 English language learners at University of Toronto and concluded that vocabulary depth and size are useful predictors of reading performance. Similarly, Cunningham and Stanovich (1997) reported that “vocabulary assessed in first grade predicted over 30% of reading comprehension variance in eleventh grade” (Kamil & Hiebert, 2005, p. 116). A good knowledge of vocabulary can facilitate the learning of other aspects of the English language.

According to what has been mentioned above, we can conclude that vocabulary knowledge plays a pivotal role in communication and other aspects of language learning. A good command of vocabulary is a prerequisite for students' English language development. To facilitate students' English language learning process, policy makers, English teachers and students should be aware of the importance of vocabulary knowledge. Meanwhile, useful resources and effective strategies need to be explored and utilized to help students increase the quantity and quality of vocabulary knowledge.

Research on Vocabulary Teaching and Learning

Receptive Vocabulary and Productive Vocabulary

Vocabulary falls into two categories: receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. Nation (2001) explained that receptive use of vocabulary “involves perceiving the form of a word while listening or reading or retrieving its meaning” (p.24); productive use of vocabulary means “wanting to express a meaning through speaking or writing and retrieving and producing appropriate spoken or written word form” (p.25). In other word, if the English language learners are able to understand the meaning of a word when they hear it or read it, they have receptive control of the word. The English language learners are in productive control of the word if they can use the word to express themselves orally or in writing within an appropriate context. It is widely acknowledged that students’ receptive vocabulary is much larger than their productive vocabulary. This logic is not difficult to understand. In many cases, students know the spelling, pronunciation and meaning of words, but they don’t know how to use these words when they speak or write. To be proficient in the English language, the learners should have both receptive and productive control of vocabulary.

Zhou (2010) conducted a study to compare receptive and productive academic vocabulary knowledge of Chinese EFL learners. The results showed that Chinese non-English college students have a larger receptive academic vocabulary size than productive academic vocabulary size. Due to the disparity between the size of students’ receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary, it is necessary to transform receptive

vocabulary to productive vocabulary. Yamamoto (2011) proposed that a gap should be bridged between students' receptive and productive vocabulary size. Her research explored the extent to which doing extensive reading with writing tasks promotes productive vocabulary growth of Japanese university students. Although the results showed no significant increase in the productive vocabulary size, it was found that these strategies helped to retain both receptive and productive vocabulary knowledge.

The reviewed literature has demonstrated that it is necessary for students to have both receptive and productive control of vocabulary. However, the size of students' productive vocabulary is much smaller than that of receptive vocabulary (Zhou, 2010). These findings are instructive for English vocabulary teaching. It is imperative for teachers to design meaningful instructional activities to help students increase productive vocabulary.

Intentional Learning and Incidental Learning

According to Nation (2001), the process of vocabulary learning is generally divided into two categories: intentional learning and incidental learning. Intentional learning focuses on vocabulary itself. It refers to the deliberate use of various strategies to learn vocabulary and conscious use of different means to memorize words (their meaning, sound, and spelling). On the contrary, in incidental learning, vocabulary acquisition is the byproduct of other communicative activities that are not directly related to vocabulary, in particular reading and listening activities. Through engaging in these activities, the English language learners "pick up" words in the texts.

Both intentional and incidental learning serve as important ways to acquire vocabulary. According to Hunt and Beglar (1998), incidental vocabulary learning is a useful approach for all language learners at all levels. Compared with incidental learning, intentional learning is used more frequently in English vocabulary instruction. However, to some extent, incidental learning enjoys more advantages than intentional learning. In a review of literature about incidental vocabulary learning, Krashen (1989) concluded that incidental vocabulary learning achieves better results than intentional vocabulary learning. Huckin and Coady (1999) emphasized the importance of incidental vocabulary learning and argued that vocabulary learning predominantly occurs through extensive reading, with the learner guessing at the meaning of unknown words. Incidental learning of vocabulary is claimed to have certain advantages over direct instruction. Firstly, compared with traditional teaching (intentional learning), incidental learning is contextualized, giving the learner a richer sense of a word's use and meaning in different meaningful contexts. Secondly, during incidental learning, vocabulary acquisition and reading happen at the same time, making it a more efficient pedagogy. Thirdly, it is a more learner-centered and individualized activity in that learners have the freedom to choose the reading materials they are interested in and acquire vocabulary (Huckin and Coady, 1999).

In addition, a strong connection between incidental vocabulary learning and extensive reading has been confirmed. Krashen's (2003) comprehension hypothesis claimed that comprehensible input is a necessary and sufficient condition for language development and extensive reading can provide such a condition. Cunningham & Stanovich (1998) maintained that reading volume is very important in terms of long-term

vocabulary development. Day, Omura & Hiramatsu (1991) did a survey among Japanese EFL students and claimed that foreign language students can learn target vocabulary incidentally through reading silently for entertainment in the classroom. They concluded that pleasure reading should be included in a foreign language curriculum.

Furthermore, As Kamil & Hiebert (2005) have stated, “dependence on a single vocabulary instruction method will not result in optimal learning” (p. 7). A balance should be reached between different vocabulary teaching methods. Recent studies of second language learners showed that a combined approach of incidental learning and intentional learning is superior to incidental vocabulary learning alone. Zhou (2010) suggested that in order to improve learners’ academic vocabulary knowledge in terms of both receptive and productive abilities, it is very important to combine learning vocabulary incidentally through communicative activities with explicit vocabulary learning. In a research which investigated the role of reading in L2 vocabulary acquisition and the effects of different vocabulary instructional techniques on the vocabulary acquisition of ESL (English as a Second Language) students in Chinese universities, Guo (2010) found that a combination of incidental and intentional learning instruction leads to greater vocabulary gains and better retention. In addition, she also confirmed the decisive role of students’ vocabulary size in acquiring the productive aspect of the vocabulary knowledge. Parry (1997) demonstrated how a combination of incidental and intentional learning of vocabulary during reading could be possible and helped the overall development of L2 vocabulary as well as academic success in L2. Zimmerman (1994) found that three hours a week of explicit vocabulary instruction plus some self-selected reading were more effective than reading alone.

To sum up, both intentional learning and incidental learning are important ways to learn vocabulary. Meanwhile, extensive reading has proved to be an effective way for acquiring vocabulary incidentally. It is essential for English teachers to place equal emphasis on intentional and incidental learning of vocabulary and employ multiple instructional strategies to assist students in acquiring vocabulary in a more effective way. Besides, students should be encouraged to read extensively to incidentally enlarge their vocabulary size.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

The communicative language teaching (CLT) rose to prominence in Europe and the United States in the early 1970s. Hymes' theory of communicative competence laid the theoretical framework of CLT. As Hymes (1972) put it, to know a language, one not only needs to have a knowledge of the rules of grammar (i.e. linguistic competence) but also to have a knowledge of the rules of language use (i.e. communicative competence). CLT stressed the interdependence between form and meaning, and tried to attend to both the functional and structural aspects of language (Brown, 2001). Richards and Rodgers (1986) summarized CLT as: (1) that activities that involve real communication promote learning; (2) that activities in which language is used for carrying out meaningful tasks promote learning; and (3) that language that is meaningful to the learner supports the learning process (p.72). Nunan (1991) defined the general principles or features of CLT (p. 279) as follows:

1. An emphasis on learning to communicate through interaction in the target language.
2. The introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation.
3. The provision of opportunities for learners to focus, not only on language but also on the learning process itself.
4. An enhancement of the learner's own personal experiences as important contributing elements to classroom learning.
5. An attempt to link classroom language learning with language activities outside the classroom.

The key assumptions and general principles about CLT demonstrate that a connection between the language taught in the classroom and its application in real life outside of the classroom should be emphasized. According to CLT, one of the major goals for language teaching is to help students develop communicative competence. CLT has great implications for English vocabulary teaching. It indicates that the major goal of vocabulary teaching is increasing students' communicative competence. Meanwhile, interaction is important means and goal of vocabulary learning. Moreover, vocabulary should be taught in meaningful and authentic context. The principles of CLT can serve as important guidelines for English vocabulary teaching practice.

Assessment of Vocabulary

Vocabulary teaching is crucial for students' vocabulary development. How vocabulary is assessed plays an equally important role. According to Read (2000), the role of context in a vocabulary test is an important dimension of vocabulary assessment. Some assessment methods are context-independent. Students are provided with isolated words and are required to figure out the meanings without any context to infer from. By comparison, in context-dependent vocabulary tests, students can make use of contextual clues to accomplish the assessment. Pearson, Hiebert, & Kamil (2007) identified that there was increasing contextualization of vocabulary assessment during the past two decades. Many scholars emphasized the importance of using context-dependent vocabulary assessment. As Stahl and Kapinus (2001) stated, "When children 'know' a word, they not only know the word's definition and its logical relationship with other words, they also know how the word functions in different contexts." Stahl (2005) maintained that, "Vocabulary knowledge is knowledge; the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world." In a study conducted to examine the effect of zero context and sentence context on vocabulary testing, Gao (2007) found that sentences play an important role in helping text-takers to figure out the correct meaning or target words (p. 42). It is widely acknowledged that context provides students with information that can help them understand words more easily. However, some scholars argued that it was not always good to provide contextual clues in assessment. Folse (2003) pointed out that contextual clues that could facilitate language comprehension were absent in many real world situations. In view of this,

context independent vocabulary assessment is also needed. Context-independent and context-dependent assessment are used to test different things. Read (2000) stated that discrete vocabulary assessment is to examine students' knowledge at the word level while embedded vocabulary assessment is to test students' use of vocabulary as it pertains to a spoken or written text students have produced. Teachers need to select the appropriate vocabulary assessment method based on the goal of the assessment as well as issues concerning validity and reliability.

Vocabulary knowledge is a complex concept. Nagy and Scott (2000) identified five basic aspects of word knowledge: incrementality, multidimensionality, polysemy, interrelatedness, and heterogeneity. Due to the complexity of vocabulary knowledge, multiple assessment tools should be employed to investigate the students' vocabulary development from different aspects. As Schmitt (2000) put it, vocabulary knowledge is multifaceted and no test can tap into all forms of vocabulary knowledge. It is necessary for teachers to use multiple measures of vocabulary assessment so that they can get a more comprehensive view of students' mastery of vocabulary knowledge. Under any circumstances, teachers must ensure that assessment of students' vocabulary is meaningful. Meanwhile, it is equally important to measure students' vocabulary development using more diversified assessment tools.

Vocabulary Teaching in China

Since the reform and opening up of China in the 1970s, Chinese government has been putting increasing emphasis on English language education for its critical role in

China's modernization. Huge national efforts and resources have been invested in English language education (Hu, 2003). According to a national survey, 415.95 million people learn one or more foreign languages in Mainland China, among them, 93.8 % (390.16 million) learn English as their foreign language (Wei & Su, 2012). In China, the Ministry of Education (MOE) is the highest educational administrative body. It is responsible for the development of national curriculum across all subject areas. In 1978, the MOE of China issued the first draft English syllabus for primary and secondary schools. The teaching of English has been standardized in Chinese primary schools since 2001. In September 2001, English became a recognized subject in the primary school curriculum from Grade 3 (Wang, 2005).

Philosophy of Curriculum Design

The underlying philosophy for designing the most recent English Standards (MOE, 2011) includes six aspects:

- 1). Focus on competence-oriented education and embody the effect of language learning on students' all-round development.
- 2). Concern the needs of all students and pay attention to individual differences of language learners.
- 3). Design comprehensive goals and fully considered the incrementality and continuity of the language learning process.

- 4). Emphasize the process of language learning and stress the importance of practicality and applicability of language learning.
- 5). Optimize assessment methods and focus on evaluating students' comprehensive language application ability.
- 6). Use extensive teaching resources and expand channels for students to learn English (pp. 2-4).

MOE regarded English as a course which combines instrumentality and humanity.

“It is not only a tool for communication, but also a course that helps students improve attainments of humanity, cultivate cross-cultural awareness and establish the right philosophy and value of life.” (MOE, 2011, p. 2) It was in 1993 that the word “communication” first appeared in the English Syllabus in China. The revisions of the Standards in the following years indicate an increasing focus on students' ability to use English to communicate. The most recent English Standards for junior high schools (MOE, 2011) attached great importance to “the ability to do things using English” (p. 12). English teachers are required to pay attention to language practice and help students develop skills to use language. According to Lee (2007), the present curriculum focuses on the ability to use the target language for communication, which is based on the development of (a) language skills, (b) English language knowledge, (c) students' affective attitudes (d) students' learning strategies, and (e) cultural awareness (p. 14). Zhang (2014) also found that the English Curriculum Standards (Ministry of Education, 2001, 2011) implemented since 2001 intended to develop learners' communicative competence, foster learner autonomy, and encourage interactive classroom participation.

The revisions of Standards have brought about substantive improvements in English curriculum.

Curriculum Objectives

The general curriculum objective is to “enable students to possess basic comprehensive language application ability, promote intellectual development and improve personal qualities through learning the English language” (MOE, 2011, p. 8). In terms of vocabulary teaching, the 1993 syllabus required junior high school students to master 600 words. The requirement was soon found to be inadequate for students to develop English language skills for the 21st century. Therefore, the syllabus was revised in 2000. The revised syllabus added 220 words to increase the vocabulary size required of students. Students are expected to master about 830 words by the end of junior high school. MOE published the National English Curriculum Standards (the trial version) in 2001. According to the Standards (MOE,2001), by the end of junior high school, students are required to master 800 words and 200 phrases and know how to use them both in writing and speaking. In addition, they are expected to recognize 400-500 words. Students are also required to understand the listening materials which speed at 80 words per minutes.

In 2011, MOE issued the revised version of National English Curriculum Standards. According to the new Standards (MOE, 2011), students are expected to “master 1500-1600 words and 200-300 phrases by the end of junior high school” (p. 19). The newly added vocabulary includes fridge, Christmas, bookshop, meter, temperature,

etc. The new Standards (MOE, 2011) have also required students to “achieve an extracurricular reading quantity beyond 150 thousand words by the end of 9th grade” (p.17). Teachers are encouraged to use teaching resources extensively to facilitate students’ self-directed learning. Revisions in Standards by MOE put forward increasingly high demands to junior high school students in terms of the breadth and depth of vocabulary knowledge. The revisions also indicate the increasingly important role of vocabulary teaching in English language education.

Implementation Suggestions

In the 2011 Standards, implementation suggestions were provided in terms of instruction, assessment, textbook compilation as well as exploitation and utilization of teaching resources.

As for instruction, it is suggested that:

- 1). Teachers should help all students lay a solid foundation for learning English.
- 2). Teachers should focus on language practice and improve students’ competence in using the language.
- 3). Teachers should strengthen the instruction of learning strategies and improve students’ autonomous learning capability.
- 4). Teachers should cultivate students’ cross-cultural awareness and intercultural communication competence (MOE, 2011, pp. 25-28).

“Assessment methods and examples” is a new section in the most recent English Curriculum in China (MOE, 2011, p. 33). The rationality and diversity of assessment is

emphasized in this section. Self-assessment, peer assessment, parent assessment are proposed to be incorporated into the evaluation system. Teachers are expected to “employ a combination of summative and formative assessment. Summative assessment should focus on examining students’ comprehensive skills of using the English language. Summative assessment takes the form of speaking, listening, and writing tests.” (MOE, 2011, pp. 35-36). Formative assessment can be used to “monitor and promote the teaching and learning process” (MOE, 2011, p. 36). Formative assessment includes “pop quiz, portfolio, and questionnaire, interview, etc.” (MOE, 2011, p. 36).

There are also suggestions in regard to textbooks in the 2011 Standards. Textbook editors and writers are suggested to follow four basic principles when compiling textbooks: the ideological principle, the scientific principle, the principle of enjoyment and the principle of flexibility (MOE, 2011). It is worth pointing out that in the new textbooks, neither the property nor the meaning of vocabulary is allowed to be provided in the appendix glossary. The aim is to prevent rote memorization of words without resorting to meaningful context. As for teaching resources, MOE (2011) encouraged to explore and utilize extensive resources for English instruction: textbooks, school facilities, website and students (incorporate students’ personal experience, emotions and thought into curriculum design).

CHAPTER 3 METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study was to examine the current situation of vocabulary teaching in Chinese junior high schools from the perspectives of in-service English teachers. The purposes of this section are to (1) elaborate on the rationale for the study design, (2) explain the selection of subjects, (3) demonstrate the design of questionnaires, and (4) describe procedures and methods used to analyze data.

Design

According to Ary, Jacobs, Razavieh, & Sorensen (2009), survey research is used by investigators to “ask questions about peoples’ beliefs, opinions, characteristics, and behavior” (p. 372). The purpose of this study was to investigate individual teacher’s personal beliefs, opinions about and actual practice in English vocabulary teaching in Chinese junior high schools. In view of this, survey research is an appropriate research method to be employed in this study. In survey research, there are two basic data-gathering techniques: interviews and questionnaires (Ary, et al., 2009, p. 379). Compared with interviews, questionnaires provide participants more time to produce more thoughtful responses. In addition, Dillman (2000) found that e-mail questionnaires have the advantage of prompter returns, lower item nonresponse, and more complete answers

to open-ended questions. For this study, more truthful, comprehensive and thoughtful responses from participants will provide the author a better view of the current English vocabulary teaching practice in Chinese junior high schools. They also increase the validity and reliability of the study. For what have been mentioned above, the author adopted email questionnaire to conduct the study.

Three teachers in total participated in this study. The data generated from their responses to questionnaires was limited. Therefore, the study also used a narrative review to examine documents (English Curriculum) regarding the current official policy on English vocabulary teaching in Chinese junior high schools. As a form of research synthesis, a narrative review can help to retrieve and analyze the most readily available documents related to the topic of this study (Davies, 2000). In this way, a gap can be discovered between policy and practice and suggestions can be made to fill the gap accordingly. The official English Curriculum issued by Ministry of Education (MOE) in China served as important complementary resources to investigate the current situation of vocabulary teaching in Chinese junior high schools. These documents are accessible from the official website of MOE (<http://www.moe.edu.cn>). The curriculum provides rich information about the current policy of English instruction in junior high schools. There are detailed descriptions about the goals, requirements, content of as well as assessment tools of English teaching in the curriculum. The data collected from the e-mail questionnaires, together with and the documents, enabled the author to have a more in-depth and comprehensive insight into the current vocabulary teaching practice in Chinese junior high schools.

Subject

The choice of the target population is due to the fact that English teachers are the ones that take the major responsibility for teaching English vocabulary to students. Their instructional practice has a direct impact on students' vocabulary learning and English language development in schools. Most importantly, they are the ones who can provide first-hand information about how vocabulary is being taught in Chinese junior high schools based on their professional experience.

Subjects were recruited on a voluntary basis. The author sent an informational email (see Appendix A) to English teachers in junior high schools in Jintan, Jiangsu. The email contained general information about the study. Those who would be willing to participate in the study were told to contact the author by replying to the informational email. Upon agreement to participate in the study, teachers were provided with the consent form through email. They were ensured that all the information they provided in this study would be kept confidential and the data would be used for research purpose only. Because of the language difference, all documents and correspondence were in Chinese, with English translations attached.

Three participants in total replied and agreed to participate in the study. One withdrew from the study as the study progressed. One of the remaining two participants recruited another teacher to join the study. All the three participants are female teachers aged from 30-40. Teacher A is a 38-year-old female English teacher. She teaches Grade 7 in School 1. Teacher B is a 33-year old female English teacher. She also teaches Grade 7 in School 1. Teacher C is a 35-year-old female English teacher who teaches Grade 8 in

School 2. School 1 and School 2 are two junior high schools located in different districts in Jintan City, Jiangsu Province. The participants in this study have similar ethnic, racial and language backgrounds. They all belong to Han ethnic group. In addition, they all speak Chinese as their first language and English as a second or foreign language.

Materials

The questionnaire in the study addressed four purposes. The first purpose was to examine the strategies and resources that are being used to teach and assess English vocabulary by the teachers. The second purpose was to investigate the challenges the English teachers might have encountered in their teaching experience. The third purpose was to obtain information about the influence of some external factors (i.e. policy and parent pressure) on English vocabulary teaching practice. The fourth purpose was to survey the possible changes in these teachers' English teaching pedagogy throughout their teaching career and factors contributing to the changes perceived by the teachers.

The questionnaire (see Appendix B) included eight open-ended questions in total. Question 1 was used to elicit a general description of how the teachers teach English vocabulary in the Chinese context. Question 2-4 addressed issues about resources and strategies used for teaching and assessing English vocabulary. Question 5 dealt with possible challenges teachers might confront with in English vocabulary teaching practice. Question 7 and 8 concerned the influence of policy and parent pressure respectively. Question 8 examined the possible changes in English teaching pedagogy and their possible contributing factors. The questionnaires were emailed to the participants in

October, 2014. Recipients were requested to complete the questionnaire and reply to the author through email in the following two months.

In terms of official curriculum, two most recent English Standards were used in this study. One was issued in 2001 and the other was published in 2011. The 2001 Standards was used as reference so that changes in policy would come into light through comparison with the 2011 edition, which is the most updated version of English Standards. There were 4 sections in the 2011 Standards. Section 1 is Foreword. In this section, the underlying philosophy of curriculum design is discussed. Section 2 Curriculum Objectives included both the overall objective and hierarchical objectives for different grade levels. Section 3 Tired Standards covered multiple standards for language skills, knowledge of language, emotional attitudes, learning strategies and cultural awareness. Section 4 Implementation Suggestions offered suggestions for instruction, assessment, textbook compilation as well as exploitation and utilization of teaching resources. Other materials like glossary, assessment and examples were attached as appendixes.

Methods of Analysis

Data collected for this study included participants' descriptive responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. The analysis began as the author reviewed teachers' responses to each question. The author created a series of analytic notes while reading the collected data. Key ideas, words, and phrases of each participant were noted down. In order to compare the similarities and differences between the data of each

participant, the author employed a coding system using various colors to mark recurring phrases and themes as well as responses that differ from each other. In addition, comparison was made between teachers' responses and corresponding statements in the Standards. The conclusions drawn from the comparative procedure became the foundations of the final themes.

For instance, when asked of the strategies used to assess vocabulary, Teacher A said she assessed students' vocabulary mostly through dictation (the teacher reads a word and students are expected to spell the word and write down its Chinese equivalent in their exercise books, or sometimes the teacher says the meaning of a word in Chinese and students are to figure out the corresponding English word and spell it out. There may be more than one English word that has the similar meaning in Chinese. But in most cases, only the word in the target lesson or unit is regarded as the correct answer). Sometimes she would invite individual students to explain the meaning of certain words orally. Teacher A found that students hate dictation and prefer other forms of assessment. Like Teacher A, Teacher B also used dictation frequently to examine students' vocabulary knowledge. She also sensed that her students were tired of dictation. Teacher C mainly referred to the new Standards and tried to include more formative assessment (for instance, group discussion, self-assessment, peer assessment, portfolios) in her class. According to the 2011 Standards, teachers should pay attention to the rationality and diversity of assessment tools. Both formative and summative assessment should be used in class. The above data showed that most teachers were mainly using summative and context-independent assessment like dictation to assess students' vocabulary. Some teachers tried to follow the Standards and use more formative assessment tools. Overall, a

balance should be constructed between formative and summative assessment as well as between context-dependent and context-independent assessment.

CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

Data analysis provided a wealth of information about how English vocabulary is being taught in Chinese junior high schools: 1). Teachers are using multiple resources and strategies to teach vocabulary; 2). Teachers are using different assessment tools to measure students' vocabulary knowledge; 3). Teachers feel it challenging to teach certain types of vocabulary; 4). There are big differences between the current English vocabulary teaching pedagogy and that of the past; 5). Official policy has been exerting great influence on the English vocabulary teaching and learning process; 6). Teachers are experiencing different degrees of pressure from students' parents.

Resources and Strategies to Teach Vocabulary

In terms of resources that are being used to teach vocabulary, all the participants mentioned textbooks and extracurricular readings. Teacher A and Teacher C also used resources on the Internet when preparing for lesson plans. For Teacher C, dictionary was also good resource for vocabulary teaching. For both Teacher A and Teacher B, they mainly taught key vocabulary as is required by Standards. For other extracurricular words and phrases, students are encouraged to learn by themselves outside of the class.

Data showed that all the participants used a variety of strategies when teaching English vocabulary. Teacher A used context (teach words in sentences and texts in the textbooks), passages, derivation, charts, images, word groups, affixes, and association. Teacher B used context, images, affixes, word groups and phonetics during her instruction. As for Teacher C, she also used context, word formation, roots and affixes. Meanwhile, she taught synonyms and antonyms when introducing new words to students so that they can learn and memorize words in groups. Teacher A said that she learned a lot of useful strategies from her colleague and books. Agreeing with Teacher A, Teacher B added that the study skill section in the new textbooks were also instructive.

Resources and Strategies to Assess Vocabulary

For both Teacher A and Teacher B, colleagues and books served as major resources to design vocabulary assessment activities. Teacher C tended to consult the Standards when assessing English vocabulary. Teacher A mainly used dictation to examine if students have acquired certain vocabulary. Sometimes, she also invite students to explain the meaning of words orally in front of the class. Like Teacher A, Teacher B also used dictation as the major way to test vocabulary. Despite the frequent use of dictation in class, both Teacher A and Teacher B realized that it's not the optimal way. Teacher A said, "My students hate dictation, they like oral explanation better". Similarly, Teacher B said, "My students seem to be tired of dictation". In line with requirements of the new Standards, Teacher C tried to include more formative assessment in her class. She mentioned that she tried to use group discussion, self-assessment, peer assessment,

portfolios. She believed that formative assessment can facilitate the English vocabulary teaching and learning process.

Challenges in Vocabulary Teaching

When it comes to challenges in English vocabulary teaching, Teacher A felt it challenging to teach long words and words with similar forms or meanings. In order to solve this problem, Teacher A used a series of strategies. For example, she focused on phonetic rules to help students use pronunciation to spell and memorize long words. Moreover, she used charts and sample questions from tests to help students distinguish between synonyms and homonyms. Teacher B also found it difficult to teach long words. In addition, she identified that teaching infrequent words and homonyms were also challenging. When teaching those words, she would first make sure that students pronounce the words correctly and understand the meaning of the words. She thought students could memorize these words better according to their pronunciation and meaning. Like Teacher A, she also used sample questions from tests sometimes. Teacher C didn't mention any challenges during her vocabulary instruction. She emphasized the importance of helping each student find a set of suitable strategies to acquire and memorize vocabulary.

Changes in English Vocabulary Teaching Pedagogy

Overall, all the participants saw a big change between their current English vocabulary teaching pedagogy and that of their earlier years. Rote memorization and mechanical repetition were frequently mentioned when they recalled their former teaching practice. Teacher A wrote, “In retrospect, I mainly used rote memorization, dictation and exercises during my early years of vocabulary teaching. Now I find there are certain rules and shortcuts for English vocabulary teaching. ” Teacher B recalled, “During my first years of vocabulary teaching, I used rote memorization and exercises frequently. Now I pay more attention to teaching students strategies to learn vocabulary.” As for Teacher C, she used to teach vocabulary in isolation. She said, “At the beginning of a unit, I would teach the vocabulary first. It was not until students learned the words in the glossary that they were introduced the passages and dialogues. Gradually I realized that vocabulary should not be taught without context.” Compared with past years, teacher are using various vocabulary teaching strategies during instruction. Teacher A said, “In addition to exercises, I also use word grouping, charts, association, affixes, motions, and games to help students memorize vocabulary effectively”. Teacher A also mentioned that through observing model lessons of some excellent teachers, she realized that in order to teach vocabulary effectively, she should focus on the teaching of phonetics first. It is equally important to teach vocabulary in context. Teacher B also pays more attention to the use of strategies in teaching vocabulary has figured out a way to transform mechanical repetition to meaningful memorization. She elaborated, “The first step is to make sure that students pronounce the word correctly. Then I put words in

sentences to help students understand the meanings”. She mentioned that improvement in the new textbook and claimed textbooks provided many useful tips to teach vocabulary, for example, using affixes and charts. Like other teachers, Teacher C is also employing multiple strategies to teach vocabulary in order to stimulate students’ enthusiasm for learning English. She has come up with my unique way of English vocabulary teaching through years of exploration. She summarized it as: “Listening and speaking go first; increase quantity and quality of vocabulary simultaneously and step by step; teach vocabulary in context, and pay attention to cultural connotations of vocabulary”. In her words, “Students can learn to use and use to learn in this way”.

Influence of Policy

Speaking of the influence of policy on English vocabulary teaching and learning, Teacher A said, “Test has always been the baton in English instruction”. Students and their parents pay more attention to English language learning as a result of test pressure. Similarly, Teacher B maintained that Students shouldered great pressure under the current test system. She said, “Stress of entering higher level schools is pushing students to study English hard.” While acknowledging the role of policy in protecting the important position of English in Chinese educational system, Teacher C also pointed out some insufficiencies and areas for improvement:

Chinese government has developed a series of policies to ensure the important status of English education across all levels of education in China. However, students spend much time on rote memorization and test preparation, but are not

able to apply what they have learned into practice. Chinese English education should break the tether of test-oriented mode and focus on improving students' practical skills in English. Students should be encouraged to speak, write and practice more.

Pressure from Students' Parents

Both Teacher A and Teacher B said they were trusted by students' parents. They experienced no pressure from parents. They agreed that parents are supportive of their work. Unlike Teacher A and Teacher B, Teacher C thought she suffered from pressure posed by parents of her students. In her words:

I feel pressured by parents. Many parents hope that their children can learn English well within a short period of time. However, as a matter of fact, English learning is an accumulative process and takes time to achieve a fluent level. In addition, students lack English language input outside of the classroom. Textbooks and instructional strategies need to be improved to facilitate students' English language learning process.

CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION

Insights

In view of what has been discussed above, it is obvious that all the participants have been devoted to finding methods to teach vocabulary in a more effective way. They have made great progress compared with their former teaching practice. Firstly, they resort to more resources when developing instructional activities to teach vocabulary. In the past, textbooks and exercise books have been the major resources for vocabulary teaching. Now, English teachers also refer to extracurricular readings and resources on the Internet. In this way, students are able to learn vocabulary in various meaningful contexts. There is a parallel between the instructional practice of the teachers and suggestions in the 2011 Standards. According to the Standards (MOE, 2011), teachers are expected to explore and utilize extensive resources for English instruction. “Rational development and active use of teaching resources is an important guarantee for the effective implementation of the curriculum” (p. 41). The resources of the English course include “English textbooks, and other teaching materials, support system and educational environment that are conducive to the development of students’ overall language application capability. For instance, audio-visual materials, visual aids and real objects, multimedia software, radio and TV programs, network resources, newspapers and magazines, as well as other teaching facilities and settings like library, class, and school ”

(p. 41). The teachers who participated in this study have made good use of resources that are available to them have expanded channels for students to learn English.

Secondly, teachers are using multiple strategies during vocabulary instruction. In response to the questionnaires, all the participants mentioned that they tended to use few strategies monotonously and recalled that they relied on rote memorization or mechanical repetition exclusively during their early years of teaching. Now they have a changed view of how vocabulary can be taught effectively. They understand the importance of context and are employing various strategies to teach vocabulary. For example, they use images, real objects, charts, roots, affixes, word groups frequently during their vocabulary instruction. The use of images, real objects and other resources provides rich context for vocabulary acquisition. According to Richards and Rodgers (1986), it is important to use meaningful language to support the language learning process. Nunan (1991) stated that the introduction of authentic texts into the learning situation is one of the most important principles of CLT. By exposing students to various contexts and demonstrate how vocabulary can be appropriately used in different situations, the teachers can help students develop communicative competence. As Hymes (1972) pointed out, knowing a language means having a knowledge of the rules of language use (i.e. communicative competence) in addition to the rules of grammar (i.e. linguistic competence).

Communication is also an important theme in the most recent English Curriculum. The Curriculum has put great stress on students' 'ability to do things using English' and use the target language for the purpose of communication (MOE, 2011, p.12). In addition, the Curriculum (MOE, 2011) suggested that teachers should teach students how to use certain strategies to improve students' autonomous learning capacity. When teachers

teach vocabulary using roots, affixes, and word groups, they are scaffolding the use of these vocabulary learning strategies to students.

Thirdly, teachers are using increasingly diversified tools to assess students' vocabulary. In addition to dictation, they are also testing students' vocabulary in alternative ways. For example, two participants both had students provide an oral explanation of certain words orally in front of the class. Sometimes, games and competition were also used to arouse students' interest in learning English vocabulary. What's more, Teacher C tried to incorporate more formative assessment in her class. She thought using alternative assessment tools like peer assessment, group discussion and portfolios is beneficial to both teachers and students. Due to the sophisticated nature of vocabulary knowledge, it is impossible to tap into all forms of vocabulary knowledge with a single test (Schmitt, 2000). Employing multiple measures of vocabulary assessment can provide a more comprehensive view of students' vocabulary development. The 2011 Standards also encouraged teachers "employ a combination of formative and summative assessment", with the former focusing on monitoring and promoting the teaching and learning process and the latter serving as a tool to test students' comprehensive skills of using English (MOE, 2011, p. 35). To conclude, it is necessary for teachers to make vocabulary assessment more diversified and choose the right form of assessment based on different purposes of assessment.

Overall, teachers feel trusted and supported by students' parents. In cooperation with parents, teachers can help students learn English more effectively both at home and at school. In addition, the new Standards and textbooks (especially the section of

implementation and suggestions) provide teachers with useful information about how English vocabulary should be taught. In this study, Teacher C referred to the new standards and decided to include more formative assessment like “pop quiz, portfolio, and questionnaire, interview” in her English class (MOE, 2011, p. 36). Teacher B mentioned that the study skills section in the new textbook (for example, prefixes, suffixes and phonetics teaching tips) instructed her to teach vocabulary more effectively. What’s more, influence of colleagues should not be ignored. During their teaching practice, teachers have been mutually reinforcing each other in teaching vocabulary. It is through mutual learning and assimilation that teachers discover and incorporate various vocabulary teaching strategies in their instruction. Teacher A recalled how observing model lessons of her colleagues changed her approach to teach vocabulary. For both Teacher A and Teacher B, their colleagues are valuable resources to the development of vocabulary assessment activities.

Pedagogical Implications

The data of this study revealed that progress has been made in English vocabulary teaching in Chinese junior high schools. However, there are still areas for further improvement. Implications of the current study are discussed in this section.

Firstly, English teachers in Chinese junior high schools should put more emphasis on productive vocabulary in their teaching practice. As Teacher C pointed out, many Chinese junior high school students are good at taking English tests, but are not able to put what they have learned into practice. What they learned is called “dumb English”,

which means students can understand English but don't know how to speak or write in English properly. In other words, students in Chinese junior high schools lack productive control of vocabulary. Receptive vocabulary refers to the words that students can understand when you hear or read them. Productive vocabulary means the words students are able to use to express themselves in speech or writing. Students' receptive vocabulary is considerably larger than their productive vocabulary. In many occasions, students know the spelling, pronunciation and meaning of words, but they don't know how to use these words when they speak or write. The difference between the two categories lies in the depth of vocabulary knowledge. According to Zhou (2010), words are known receptively first and become available for productive use only after intentional or incidental learning. From her point of view, vocabulary knowledge should be regarded as a "continuum on which a word grows from receptive to productive status" (Zhou, 2010, p. 15). Hence, it raises higher demands on students to have productive control of vocabulary. A gap is to be bridged between receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. Zhou (2010) also maintained that there are more receptive activities than productive activities in class, with the former ones easier to design, control and measure.

According to the Standards (MOE, 2001), by the end of junior high school, students are required to master 800 words and 200 phrases and know how to use them both in writing and speaking. That is to say, students are expected to have productive control of those vocabulary by the end of Grade 9. In terms of speaking, students are expected to "know how to make situational dialogues based on given topics and perform short plays" (MOE, 2011, p.17). Meanwhile, they are also required to "know how to describe people or events and use connectives to indicate sequence and logical relations

in writing” (MOE, 2011, p.17). In order to help students produce vocabulary properly, teachers need to create opportunities to expose the new words in different contexts so that students can understand the meanings of words and their application in various situations. Students learn vocabulary not only for the purpose of understanding a speech or text, but also for creating their own speech and text to make themselves understood.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) encouraged students to learn English for the purpose of developing communicative competence (Hymes, 1972). Students need opportunities to acquire and produce vocabulary in various meaningful contexts.

The 2011 Standards (MOE, 2011) also emphasized the importance of practicality and applicability of language learning. One of the suggestions proposed in the English Standards is that “teachers should focus on language practice and improve students’ competence in using the language” (MOE, 2011, p. 3). Meanwhile, teachers should “cultivate students’ intercultural communication competence” (MOE, 2011, p. 28). Students’ practical competence in using vocabulary can be improved if English teachers pay more attention to productive vocabulary and design more instructional activities that create opportunities for the application of vocabulary in various meaningful contexts. For instance, teachers can invite students to create dialogues or make up stories on a given topic.

Secondly, incidental learning requires more attention from teachers. In Chinese junior high school classrooms, the majority of vocabulary teaching consists of direct instruction (intentional learning). Extensive reading has been recognized as an effective way to learn vocabulary incidentally. The new English Standards required students to

“achieve an extracurricular reading quantity beyond 150 thousand words by the end of 9th grade” (MOE, 2011, p. 17). Students are encouraged to read extracurricular readings by themselves outside of the class. In order to acquire vocabulary in textbooks, students have to spend much time memorizing the spelling and meaning as well as doing piles of exercises. Meanwhile, they have homework from other subject areas. It is doubtful whether students have the time or willingness to read extracurricular materials. Teacher C mentioned that students lack English language input after class. She also questioned the feasibility of having students read books to learn extracurricular vocabulary by themselves after class. In her words, “You can never fully trust your students when you assign them tasks like reading extracurricular books after class.”

In addition to intentional learning, incidental learning has been confirmed to play an important role in students’ long-term vocabulary development. To some extent, incidental learning enjoys more advantages than intentional learning. Firstly, compared with intentional learning, incidental learning is contextualized, giving the learner a richer sense of a word’s use and meaning in different meaningful contexts. Secondly, during incidental learning, vocabulary acquisition and reading happen at the same time, making it a more efficient pedagogy. Thirdly, it is a more learner-centered and individualized activity in that learners have the freedom to choose the reading materials they are interested in and acquire vocabulary (Huckin and Coady, 1999). Guo (2010)’s study revealed that a combination of incidental and intentional learning instruction leads to greater vocabulary gains and better retention. What’s more, a positive relationship has been confirmed between incidental vocabulary learning and extensive reading (Cunningham & Stanovich, 1998; Huckin and Coady, 1999; Omura & Hiramatsu, 1991.).

According to what has been discussed above, it can be concluded that an emphasis should be placed on incidental vocabulary learning and extensive reading is a good way for students to acquire vocabulary incidentally. In line with this, teachers should be encouraged to resort to multiple resources when making lesson plans and design more incidental learning activities for class instruction. For instance, they can spend 5 to 10 minutes reading a short excerpt from a book with students in class.

Thirdly, more formative assessment and context-dependent assessment need to be incorporated into the vocabulary measuring system. As all the teachers have mentioned, the current English education system is still exam-oriented. Data of this study showed that students and teachers suffer much stress from high-stakes tests. It seems that the fundamental problem is more about inappropriateness of test methods than the over use of tests. The majority of English assessments in China are summative. Senior high school entrance exam and college entrance exams are good examples of summative assessment. Data has shown that assessment methods like dictation still makes up the largest proportion among others in class. Both Teacher A and Teacher B are still using this method frequently in spite of the fact that they know students have strong aversion to it. In the most updated English Standards (MOE, 2011), one of the most important principles of curriculum design is “optimizing assessment methods and focusing on evaluating students’ comprehensive language application ability” (p. 4). According to the Standards (MOE, 2011), the “rationality” and “diversity” of assessment should be emphasized and teachers are expected to employ a combination of formative assessment and summative assessment in class (p. 33).

According to Schmitt (2000), vocabulary is multifaceted and no test can tap into all forms of vocabulary knowledge. In order to get a better view of students' vocabulary growth, teachers need to use multiple measures of vocabulary assessment. A balance should be reached between formative and summative assessments. In view of the current situation, more formative assessment is needed. As was listed in Standards, formative assessment includes "pop quiz, portfolio, and questionnaire, interview, etc." (MOE, 2011, p. 36). Formative vocabulary assessment in class can be in the following formats: cloze (a test in which words are removed from a text and replaced with spaces, for each space, students need to fill in a suitable word based on context.), memory games, writing essays, etc. Formative assessment can also be used to document students' vocabulary development. For example, teachers can use anecdotal notes and students' portfolios to record and track students' progress and make suitable follow-up instructional plans.

In addition, more context-dependent vocabulary assessment is needed in the English language classroom. Data of the study has revealed that most of the vocabulary assessment that is being used by teachers is context-independent. Dictation (context-free) is still the most frequently used method to measure students' vocabulary in class. Many scholars (Kapinus, 2001; Stahl, 2005.) emphasized the importance of using context-dependent vocabulary assessment. According to Stahl and Kapinus (2001), when we say children "know" a word, they not only know the word's definition and its logical relationship with other words, they also know how the word functions in different contexts. Similarly, Stahl (2005) maintained that the knowledge of a word not only implies a definition, but also implies how that word fits into the world. Read (2000) stated that discrete vocabulary assessment was used to examine students' knowledge at

the word level whereas embedded vocabulary assessment was used to test students' use of vocabulary as it pertains to a spoken or written text students have produced. Therefore, in order to examine students' knowledge about how a word functions in different contexts, context-dependent vocabulary assessment is an appropriate way to adopt. As has been pointed out by Lee (2007), the present Curriculum emphasizes the ability to use the target language for communication. In accordance with Standards, teachers need to focus on "evaluating students' comprehensive language application ability" (MOE, 2011, p. 4). To achieve this goal, more context-dependent vocabulary assessment is needed. What's more, teachers tended to use context-independent assessment in class (e.g. dictation). Adopting more context-dependent vocabulary assessment will make the assessment system more diversified and meaningful.

CHAPTER 6 CONCLUSION

Generally speaking, English teachers in Chinese junior high schools have spared no effort to improving their instruction. Compared with their early years of vocabulary teaching, they have made great progress in utilizing teaching resources and strategies as well as assessment tools. The data revealed that teachers are now resorting to more resources when developing instructional plans for vocabulary teaching. At the same time, they are using multiple vocabulary teaching strategies during their instruction. In addition, the tools they use to assess students' vocabulary are becoming more diversified. With a strong focus on “intercultural communication and understanding”, the most updated National English Curriculum is also guiding English educators to improve English teaching practice in the right direction (MOE, 2011, p.3).

Although the sample size of the study is relatively small, the data collected from the study revealed several areas for improvement with regard to English vocabulary teaching practice. Some tentative recommendations are proposed. Firstly, English teachers need to pay more attention to the teaching and testing of productive vocabulary. A gap is to be bridged between receptive vocabulary and productive vocabulary. Secondly, incidental vocabulary learning needs to be further emphasized. Extensive reading is a good way for incidental learning of vocabulary. Thirdly, more formative and context-dependent assessment needs to be incorporated into the English vocabulary

assessment system. A balanced assessment system employing diversified assessment tools is essential for examining the multiple facets of the complex vocabulary knowledge. English teachers are the ones who are capable of bringing changes to the current vocabulary teaching practice. If they have the knowledge, will, and skill to improve their instruction, vocabulary learning will be a much easier and more enjoyable experience for language learners.

As for the current study, the number of participants in the study is relatively small, which to some extent restricts the generalizability of the findings. Future research in this area might enlarge the sample size in order to draw more valid data. Moreover, this study investigated the English vocabulary teaching practice in two public schools, which are located in different districts of a city in southeast China. Broadening the geographical scope of the research by investigating more schools all around China could help researchers have a more comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the current vocabulary teaching practice in China. In addition, this study aimed to examine the problem from the perspectives of in-service English teachers. Additional research might also explore the research question from multiple perspectives. For instance, surveying students could further extend and strengthen the findings of the research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Informational E-mail

Hello,

My name is Jinghong Zhang. I am a native in Jintan, Jiangsu. I am currently pursuing my Master's degree in English Education at Purdue University in Indiana, USA. I am interested in English education in China and hope to conduct research this fall to learn about English vocabulary teaching in Chinese junior high schools.

I am writing to ask if you would be willing to participate in the research by completing an email questionnaire which includes about 8 questions. The purpose of the research is to examine the current situation of vocabulary teaching in junior high schools in Jintan from the perspectives of in-service English teachers.

I would be very grateful if you would contact me by return email (zhan1439@purdue.edu) to let me know if you would be willing to assist me with my research this fall.

I sincerely thank you for your time and attention,

With respect,

Jinghong Zhang

您好，

我是张静红，金坛当地人。目前在美国印第安纳州普渡大学攻读英语教育硕士学位。由于对中国的英语教育很感兴趣，我希望在今年秋季开展一项对中国初中英语词汇教学的研究。

我写这封邮件的目的是想征询您是否愿意参与此项研究。如若愿意的话，您将需要完成一份约含八个问题的电邮调查问卷。本项研究的目的是从在职英语教师的角度调查金坛市初中英语词汇教学现状。

如果您愿意协助我的研究，请回复邮箱（zhan1439@purdue.edu）联系告知我，非常感谢您的支持帮助。

诚挚地感谢您能在百忙之中抽出宝贵时间垂阅这封邮件。

此致

张静红

Appendix B: Questionnaire

1. How do you approach the teaching of English vocabulary in the Chinese context?
2. What resources do you use to teach English vocabulary? (Please describe 2-3 resources in detail.)
 - a. How did you choose these resources?
 - b. How do your students respond to these resources?
3. What strategies do you use to teach English vocabulary? (Please describe 2-3 strategies in detail.)
 - a. How did you choose these strategies?
 - b. How do your students respond to these strategies?
4. What resources and strategies do you use to assess students' vocabulary? (Please describe 2-3 in detail.)
 - a. How did you choose these resources and strategies?
 - b. How do your students respond to these resources and strategies?
5. What challenges do you encounter during your instructional practice? (Please describe 2-3 challenges in detail.) How do you manage these challenges?
6. Do you feel you are pressured by students' parents? If so, in what ways did parent pressure influence your instruction? How did you deal with such pressure?

7. How do you believe policy changes in English education in China influence your English teaching pedagogy (or English vocabulary teaching in particular)? Do the changes in policy and instruction have any effect on students? If so, in what ways?

8. Describe some of the changes in your English teaching pedagogy (or English vocabulary teaching in particular) compared with earlier years of your teaching career. What factors contribute to the changes? In retrospect, what do you think are the most effective resources or strategies for English vocabulary teaching?